

## Setting down your roots

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/16035419) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/16035419>.

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| Rating:          | <a href="#">Teen And Up Audiences</a>                                                                                          |
| Archive Warning: | <a href="#">No Archive Warnings Apply</a>                                                                                      |
| Category:        | <a href="#">M/M</a>                                                                                                            |
| Fandom:          | <a href="#">Friends at the Table (Podcast)</a>                                                                                 |
| Relationship:    | <a href="#">Cascabel/Even Gardner</a>                                                                                          |
| Characters:      | <a href="#">Cascabel (Friends at the Table)</a> , <a href="#">Even Gardner</a>                                                 |
| Additional Tags: | <a href="#">Domestic Fluff</a> , <a href="#">Fluff</a> , <a href="#">Post-Finale</a> , <a href="#">Season: Twilight Mirage</a> |
| Language:        | English                                                                                                                        |
| Stats:           | Published: 2018-09-19 Words: 2,091 Chapters: 1/1                                                                               |

# Setting down your roots

by [twinewool](#)

## Summary

Even and Cascabel after the finale.

Through the head fuzz of machinery Even hears the sound of an approaching engine outside the diner, and smiles.

With half his senses still meshed with the device, he begins to disconnect, audio blurring between the internal and external. The rapid click of the connection shutting off as the car door slams, a deep hum of extracting wires behind a jangle of keys, the dying rhythm of the last electronic pulse as solid boots echo on tile.

He unplugs in time to see Cascabel appear in the kitchen doorway, the ends of his hair still tingling.

“Hey. Thought you'd still be here,” Cascabel says, smiling. He's carrying a box of something heavy that he sets on the floor with a grunt. General kitchenware and replacement parts for the overhead lighting, Even thinks. He can get started on that tomorrow.

He gets up off the floor with a “hey,” and Cascabel comes over, loops an arm around his shoulder and leans up to kiss him hello. His lips buzz, and it takes Even moment to realise that it's a literal charge of static as Cascabel startles and breaks the kiss.

“Sorry!” Even says, laughing as Cascabel shakes himself, running a hand through his hair. It hasn't fluffed up much, but Even can see the way the curls stick close to his hand as he pulls it away.

Cascabel laughs. “Well, I needed waking up.”

He leans back in to kiss Even again, hand coming up to cup his cheek and pull him closer. The static buzz is gone, but Even is smitten enough to still feel like there are sparks running up his spine.

Cascabel pulls back and gives him a pointed look. “You've done that to me three times now. Are you working on the mains again?”

Even blinks, and looks sheepish. “Ah. Yeah, I was plugged in just before you came.” He gestures to the floor where he was working. “I found another patch behind the wall that's busted, although I spent half the morning thinking it was the fridge and kind of...dismantled it.”

Cascabel looks down at the parts scattered across the tiles. There were way more pieces than Even expected, and he can see the amusement in Cascabel's eyes as he follows the long curve of drained valves and pipes laid out in a line.

“Want to take a break?” Cascabel asks, eyebrow raised.

Even hums, considering, but trails off into a sigh. “Not yet. I should finish this. May as well have a fresh start tomorrow and not waste my morning fixing fridges.” He crouches down and looks over his shoulder. “Stay and keep me company though?”

“Of course.” Cascabel takes a seat on a stool nearby as Even gets back to work.

“You know I was telling people who stopped by the workshop today that this place will be up and running soon.”

Even glances up at him sceptically from the mess of pipes and wires.

“Don’t give me that look - it will be. You’ve already revamped half the kitchen, and I’ve got the order waiting on all the new furniture. It’s coming together.”

Even wants to shake his head, but the tangle of hair reaching into the fridge is pulled tight on one side. “I just think you’re inviting trouble saying it’ll be soon.”

“Well, folks were happy to hear we were making something of it.” Cascabel leans down, lifting up a panel to help one of Even’s tendrils squeeze in. “Janey wants to know how well you can make a Quire omelette, whatever that is. I think she’s got a bet running with Surge.”

“Guess it depends how well we get that taste box working. I’m going to be mistaking salt for sugar otherwise.”

Said box is sitting on the counter back home, half-finished and patched together using medical mods for humans and gustatory technology for synthetics. Even’s not quite in either category these days, so the results have been interesting so far.

“I used to make a mean frittata,” Even says, “not sure how that rates against Quire omelette.”

It isn’t long before Cascabel joins Even, kneeling beside him on the floor. Between handing him the occasional tool or screw, Cascabel rests a hand under Even’s wings, a light pressure against the small of his back. The carapace along his spine is layered in ridges, but there’s a dip where the plating thins out. Where the warmth of Cascabel’s hand sinks through, soothing, fingertips tracing back and forth.

Back when all this started Even had worried about physical touch. Beyond the softer skin of his face and palms, he doesn’t feel much anymore besides pressure and stark temperature changes. The hard planes of his body aren’t exactly comfortable either. It makes for awkward, blocky hugs and a rough time for anyone trying to get up close and personal without needing a layer of padding between them.

Cascabel has made a game of it though, seeking out the areas on Even’s body where sensation bleeds through. Coaxing him to experiment with what he can feel and where.

*“I just need to find the chinks in your armour, huh?”*

*Cascabel grins up at him from where he’s kneeling on the bed, reaching out to press a thumb along Even’s hip and thigh where the carapace splits. His touch is so warm, and the nerves there spark – heat prickling under his skin. Even feels his breath deepen, tightens a stray tendril that’s wrapped its way around Cascabel’s arm.*

*He watches as Cascabel wets his lips.*

*“What if I...”*

*He presses his thumb into the crease again, but this time he digs his nails in a little, a dull bite that's enough to make Even gasp, buck his hips—*

“That’s a little...distracting.”

Cascabel stops mid-stroke along his back. “Oh. Sorry, man.”

He lifts his hand away and chuckles as Even's hair ruffles in response, pressing a kiss to Even's cheek before he leans away. He smiles as several tendrils follow after him. Even pulls them back, face flushing.

Reining his hair in from poking at random technology was something he'd learnt pretty quickly, especially around other people's ships and hardware. Failing to stop his hair from pawing at Cascabel anytime he showed affection was now a long-running embarrassment. He doesn't need to turn around to know Cascabel is grinning at him as he wrangles half the tendrils back into a loose knot at the base of his neck.

When the fridge is finally finished, they pack up the diner and start the drive back home.

The kitchen at the house is as messed up as the kitchen in the diner, so Cascabel's made a habit of grabbing food on the way back from work. He wavers on where he wants to stop off and order takeout whilst Even steers them into town. It makes no difference to Even. He's still stuck on the usual diet of nutrient bars and ration packs courtesy of his dead taste buds. But it seems Cascabel has been thinking about his other appetite too.

“I got some scraps from the workshop for you.” Cascabel leans into the back, stretching over the seat so he can reach for something. “Surge said they were free to a good home, so I picked out anything that didn't look too janky.”

There's a rattle of metal and plastic, and Even glances back, a little guilty. “I probably shouldn't. I uh, may have eaten a few screws and a bulb when I was getting mad at the fridge for not working.”

Cascabel laughs, and there's a clunk as something drops. He falls back in his seat empty-handed. “Man. Okay. No more snacks for you today.”

“I had replacements,” Even says sheepishly.

Cascabel shakes his head. “I don't know. I pick you out the good stuff and here you are eating screws and bulbs from just any old thing.”

A tendril reaches out towards Cascabel's hand, and he takes it, let's it squirm against his palm until it settles.

“You big weirdo,” he says fondly. He runs a thumb along the edge, watches as it ripples at his touch. Even tries not to let it distract him as he pulls up to the square.

“Yeah, well. I'm your big weirdo.”

Cascabel hums in agreement. He opens up the door as the vehicle stops. “I'll be right back.”

Even watches as Cascabel heads off towards Monty's, a regular favourite, then looks out at the quiet square and the mostly empty lot. His wings are restricted in most vehicles, so he takes a chance to step out, flexing the muscle and joints with a sigh.

It's getting late and the light of Volition is starting to fade, the sky a sweeping gradient of pastel shades. He tamps down on the impulse to truly flex his wings and lift himself into the air. It's not busy in this area – there's no heavy air traffic like you get over Big Garage – but it's still not safe to fly casually. Delivery bots and local wildlife aren't always predictable, and he's heard tale of some bad collisions from a talonite who lives on the other side of Seiche. She'd offered to take him over the best skyways one day and maybe he'll take her up on it.

He flexes each wing out thinking about it, the individual parts shifting against one another, spreading to their full extent. There's a lot he can't really intuit about flying, the wings being so relatively new to his body, but he's had some practice over the past few years. Learning to fly longer distances might be a fun hobby to pick up.

There's a quiet thunk from behind him, and Even turns to see Cascabel leaning on the bonnet of the car, chin resting in both hands and a box of hot food beside him as he looks on.

“You're glittering in the sunset,” Cascabel says, smiling. “You look stunning.”

Even laughs a little and starts to draw his wings back – before fighting the impulse and leaving them half stretched. He reaches one wing around his side and sees what Cascabel means, the dusky light filtering its colours through the semi-transparent sheath.

It's not like Even's never met folks with alien bodies and modifications to rival the weirdness of his own, but Cascabel has a way of making him rethink the way he feels about his own fittings. His body changed so rapidly, the outcome so often out of his control as the symbiote did what it did. He's learnt how to make his new body useful, to live with it day to day, to understand how it functions (and malfunctions). But it's not often he's reminded of how it can be beautiful.

He grins back at Cascabel, feeling a little silly about how giddy he is over such a small thing.

Cascabel picks up his food and heads round the side of the car. “Come on old man. Can't stand around looking pretty all day.”

Even gets back in the car with him, but doesn't plug in and start it up straight away. He leans over to Cascabel instead and presses a kiss to his cheek. Then meets Cascabel's smile with another kiss on the lips.

“I should tell you how pretty you are more often,” Cascabel says, teasing. “It's cute when you're sappy.”

“You're the one sweet-talking me.” Even rests his forehead on Cascabel's. He takes a breath. “I'm glad we've got time to sit around and be sappy these days.”

“Yeah.”

Even's close enough to admire the sweep of Cascabel's lashes, the dark eyes looking up into his. It's too easy to lean back in and kiss him again.

This time Cascabel's hand comes up around the back of his neck, and Even sinks into it. They lose a few minutes to warm, lingering kisses and shared breaths in-between, and Even forgets himself enough to let a few tendrils trail over Cascabel's shoulders. Lets them curl against Cascabel's chest and wrap around his sides. They graze lightly enough to tickle and suddenly Cascabel laughs into Even's mouth, squirming.

"Okay, okay," he says, breathless as he breaks away, his smile wide as he gently pulls tendrils away from where they've twined around him. "Let's get out of here before Monty mocks us for making out in their parking lot like a pair of teenagers."

Even laughs and redirects his hair elsewhere. He starts the car, the last tendril hooking around Cascabel's hand where it rests in his lap, and they set off for home.

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